

*Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Col 2:6-7)*

John 14:23-29

Christmas gifts... where are they today? It's been a little over 4 months, since we celebrated the birth of our Savior and possibly exchanged gifts with family members or received something from mom and dad. But where are those gifts today? Do you even remember what you got for Christmas? It seems easy to forget what we got for Christmas... and sometimes kids have since stopped using the gift they received or they've moved on to something else to occupy their time. Now there are some understandable elements in this matter: you can't expect someone to use their new sled or ice fishing pole in the middle of May. But it does illustrate that we are not always the best at treasuring our gifts. The littlest children need to be reminded to say thank you and the oldest children sometimes need to be reminded to live their 'thank you's. Jesus has an encouraging word for us this day too: **"Hold on to God's Gifts!"** Simply put these gifts are **1. The Father's Constant Comfort and 2. the Son's Parting Peace, and through it all the Spirit will be working.**

**1. The Father's Constant Comfort**

It's fitting for us to meditate on these words from Jesus on this Confirmation Sunday, because Jesus gave his disciples a 'pep-talk' of sorts. Certainly this wouldn't be the last time he spoke with them, but this portion of God's Word records a transition in his life and in the lives of his disciples. It was Maundy Thursday evening and Jesus was speaking with his disciples. He told them, "He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot, but Thaddeus) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Thaddeus couldn't understand why Jesus wouldn't show himself to the world. It seems simple enough. If Jesus really wanted to be the Savior of the world, wouldn't he want to show himself to the world? Maybe we think that way too sometimes: Jesus, this whole Christianity thing would be a whole lot easier if you just showed the world who you really are—the King of kings and Lord of lords!

But the world did see Jesus. Jesus did show himself in word and deed to the world, and look what the world did to him. They crucified him! The world rejects Jesus and doesn't want to know or follow him. So, Jesus focuses on the positive comfort we have as believers. He shares something deeper than a superficial CNN news blurb announcing "Jesus is the Savior". God the Father gives us **constant comfort!**

Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." At first glance you may think to yourself, does my love make God the Father love me and make his home with me? The answer to that is most definitely NO. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). God's love is the driving force behind our love for one another—just as we heard last week. Now Jesus takes us deeper into the mysterious working of God. He says, when we love one another, when we reflect on/meditate on/and inwardly digest God's love for us and show that love to others, then we become acutely aware of God's love for us. In a special way we experience God's love, just as we experience forgiveness in a unique way when we forgive others. God's love for us is not dependent on our love—but we can reflect it and cherish God's love more & more every day.

God's most special love for us is seen in his home. Where does God make his home? Does he make it in the big city where all the important people are? Does God the Father make

his home with the Son in the most powerful government? No, he makes his home in our hearts through his Word. This doctrine is called the Mystical Union. In a mystical, supernatural way God the Father (and even God the Son) unites himself to us and makes his home in our hearts. The Spirit works behind the scenes to teach us about this union and to remind us how much our Father loves us. **Hold on to God's Gift!** The Father's Constant Comfort comes from his home in our hearts. He has made us his own children and now he sets up his rule in our hearts. This mystical union is the most intimate connection we could have with God. Jesus said, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:11). And now, Father and Son come and will make their home in our hearts and in the heart of every single believer.

In his book *Hold on to Your Kids*, Dr. Gordon Neufeld discusses and dissects a modern day problem that many families undergo. The problem? In many situations peers are having a bigger influence on kids than parents are. More and more, kids are looking to their friends for answers and support, rather than to their parents. His proof? He gives examples of kids who don't want to hug mom or dad in front of their friends or even be seen in public with their parents. While I know none of our children would ever have such problems, it did make me consider my relationship with my heavenly Father. All too often I am ashamed to confess we know him, let alone that he has his home in my heart! OR we look more to what friends or neighbors think, rather than looking to the Word of the Father for guidance. OR we find every excuse imaginable NOT to love what God teaches, as we lash out in anger or clam up in selfishness.

What are we to do? **Hold on to God's gift!** The Father's constant comfort is found in his Word of love. He wants us to know and experience his love. That's why he makes his home in our hearts. That's why his mystical union is so soothing. He doesn't look upon our many sins, but he remembers mercy. God's home in your heart comes from his Holy Spirit, the Comforter, working through the Word to teach you all things and remind you of what Christ has done. Hold on to the Word he has given you. I told you confirmands over and over in class, Treasure the Word! You won't always be sitting in a Christian classroom, with fellow believers agreeing with every word you say. You will face challenges; you will be mocked; and through it all, take comfort in your heavenly Father's love for you. Then you will know how to love, not like oppressed slaves but as children who want to please the Father.

## **2. The Son's Parting Peace**

This is an exciting time of year, isn't it? Spring has sprung. Graduations bring thrilling changes as elementary school gives way to high school, high school to college, and college to a new life (hopefully not in mom and dad's basement!). But maybe that already hints at something else. All the changes at this time of year can also be unsettling and scary. No matter where we are in life, there seem to be elements of uncertainty and possible turmoil lurking around each new corner.

The disciples of Jesus were faced with changes too. The Lord had made no secret about what was coming for him: suffering, death, resurrection, and departure lay in his future. He would be leaving his disciples and things would be different. So, uncertainty and anxiety must have rocked the disciples as their friend, teacher, and rock would soon be gone. You and I go through the same things for very different reasons. Job changes, retirement, family turmoil, congregational planning, personal financial crises, can all make our worlds shift uneasily. Time marches on, even if we don't want it too!

But Jesus had a parting gift for his disciples to hold onto; he said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be

troubled and do not be afraid.” What is peace? If you ask someone on the street, he/she might offer a bland hope for “world peace” or “social unity”. Our definition of peace is not going to meld with the world’s notion of peace. Jesus doesn’t give what the world expects. Peace in God’s sight is harmony between God and man. To have harmony, sin needed to be removed. Sin created only disharmony between God and man and between man and man. Jesus did just what we needed to have peace, as he took our sins upon himself and paid the debt of the world’s sins. This is the peace he leaves with his disciples. This is the peace which surpasses all human understanding. **Hold on to God’s gift!** Chase away fear and anxiety because you know the peace of God. You know the One who has risen from the dead to bring us this peace! No matter what the trouble in your life, God’s peace is stronger. No matter what the dilemma, God’s peace is more profound. The Son has secured peace between us and God. There is no more doubt—we have the victory of peace in the Risen Son!

The Lord Jesus said, “I do not give to you as the world gives.” Jesus doesn’t give with the expectation of payment back. The world says, “You do this for me and I’ll do that for you.” That works well when it comes to our jobs and earning a living, but it won’t do when it comes to eternal rescue and salvation. The Son’s parting peace assures us: all is done. We are at peace with God. We have harmony and a future because of the One Savior Jesus.

Jesus finishes our meditation this evening by wetting our appetites with a Christian paradox (something that appears false but is absolutely true). He said, “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’” Jesus promised his disciples that he would go away and then send the Counselor, the Holy Spirit. But even in this parting moment, he reminds them of the beautiful reality of his Ascension into heaven. This is the Christian Paradox that Jesus needed to go, so that he could come. Jesus left this earth visibly, when he ascended into heaven. But because he wasn’t confined to one place visibly, like Jerusalem, now he can come to all of us personally. Now he can bring his peace to you and me all day long! This parting peace of Jesus remains our foundation. Everything we think, say, or do starts with knowing that we are at peace with God. Jesus has done it all. **Hold on to the Son’s peace!**

Gifts are a wonderful way to show our love and appreciation for someone, and I hope we all cherish the gifts God gives us. But cherishing God’s gifts must go far deeper than a superficial thank you. **Hold on to God’s gifts!** Rejoice in the Father’s home and the Son’s peace, all because the Spirit is at work in you. AMEN.